
Introduction: representations of India at home and abroad

Introdução: representações sobre a Índia no país e no estrangeiro

Cláudia Pereira, Inês Lourenço and Rita Cachado



Electronic version

URL: <http://etnografica.revues.org/4827>

ISSN: 2182-2891

Publisher

Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 February 2017

Number of pages: 99-106

ISSN: 0873-6561

Electronic reference

Cláudia Pereira, Inês Lourenço and Rita Cachado, « Introduction: representations of India at home and abroad », *Etnográfica* [Online], vol. 21 (1) | 2017, Online since 11 March 2017, connection on 15 March 2017. URL : <http://etnografica.revues.org/4827>



Etnográfica is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

Introduction: representations of India at home and abroad

*Cláudia Pereira, Inês Lourenço
and Rita Cachado*

This dossier makes an original contribution to the semantic analysis of the representations on India. It aims to broaden the academic debate on South Asian studies by focusing on the cultural practices of both Indians and migrants and on their representations of India, a much neglected subject in the literature. The five articles it comprises examine three dimensions of representations about India. One concerns the connection between tourism and religion, and the transformation of representations of Portuguese presence in Goa. Another dimension addresses the representations of the lifestyle migrants in India and the population in Portugal, notably regarding the consumption of an Indian and Bollywood lifestyle. A third dimension focuses on South Asian migrants in Portugal embeddedness, through economic processes. The main finding that brings these papers together is that the importance given by the different actors to the cultural representations about India is so strong that it defines decisions for their life experiences. These cultural representations are heterogeneous, circulating with divergent meanings in India and abroad, grounded on different images of past and present. The articles explore their production and uses in various settings.

KEYWORDS: South Asian diaspora, cultural representations, tourism, Bollywood, ethnic clusters, lifestyle migration.

Introdução: representações sobre a Índia no país e no estrangeiro ♦ Este dossiê temático oferece um contributo original para a análise semântica das representações sobre a Índia. Tenciona alargar o debate académico no domínio dos estudos sul-asiáticos, focando-se nas práticas culturais de indianos e de migrantes e suas representações sobre a Índia, até agora menos conhecidas na literatura. O dossiê é composto por cinco artigos, que abordam três dimensões das representações. A primeira explora a relação entre turismo e religião, e a transformação das representações sobre a presença portuguesa em Goa. Uma outra aborda os imigrantes ocidentais na Índia e o seu consumo de um estilo de vida indiano e, por outro lado, a criação de identidades alternativas da população em Portugal através da influência de Bollywood. Por último, uma dimensão que narra o enraizamento de populações sul-asiáticas imigrantes em Portugal, através de processos económicos. A conclusão comum é a centralidade dada pelos diferentes atores às representações culturais sobre a Índia, de forma tão marcada que define decisões para as suas opções na vida quotidiana. Estas representações culturais são heterogêneas: circulam com significados divergentes na Índia e no estrangeiro, baseadas em diferentes imagens do passado e do presente. O dossiê explora a sua produção e usos em vários espaços.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: diáspora sul-asiática, representações culturais, turismo, Bollywood, *clusters* étnicos, migração conotada com um estilo de vida.

PEREIRA, Cláudia (claudia.pereira@iscte.pt) – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia (CIES-IUL), Lisbon, Portugal.

LOURENÇO, Inês (ines.lourenco@iscte.pt) – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia (CRIA-IUL), Lisbon, Portugal.

CACHADO, Rita (rita.cachado@iscte.pt) – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia (CIES-IUL), Lisbon, Portugal.

THIS DOSSIER EXPLORES PROCESSES OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL representations in which India is the central reference.¹ It analyses memories and imaginations of India used by individuals and groups as key elements in their identity construction processes (cf. Hall 2003 [1997]; Appadurai 1996). The first aim is to fill gaps in the knowledge on representations about India. Secondly, it proposes to deconstruct the role these representations play in the practices of everyday life. It examines them in differentiated contexts, among Indians and migrants both at home and abroad, as well as among tourists, pilgrims and consumers of Indian cinema and dance, thus broadening the debate in South Asian studies.

Our main finding is that the contents of the representations are heterogeneous. They are produced and consumed both within and outside of India and based on diverse perceptions of past and present time. These representations of India converge in that they are key mechanisms used by the different actors to define choices in everyday life and therefore their identity.

The Portuguese context is scarcely acknowledged by the international literature on South Asian diaspora, despite the remarkable group of researchers in this field in Portugal. Anthropological and historical studies on India tend to limit research to Anglo-Saxon perspectives, mainly due to their prevalence in Indian studies and to the importance of South Asians in the migrant population of the United Kingdom and USA. There is a considerable volume of scientific production on South Asian studies from Portuguese researchers; nevertheless,

1 The initial idea for this dossier came from the contributions presented at the panel “India’s Other Sites: Social and Cultural Pathways at Home and Abroad” in the 9th SIEF (Société Internationale de Ethnologie et Folklore) Conference in Lisbon, in 2011, coordinated by the editors of this publication. Acknowledgement is due to Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia (CIES-IUL), Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), for funding the proofreading of this introduction.

this literature is almost unknown internationally. This may be explained not only by the seniority of Anglo-Saxon production in the field, but also by the fact that the South Asian diaspora to the United Kingdom and USA is larger and older than that to Portugal. However, many Portuguese social scientists, and particularly anthropologists, conduct research in Indian studies, in part because the Portuguese administration held colonial territories in India. Portuguese post-colonial anthropological production is therefore abundant but, as already noted, is scarcely acknowledged in the related international literature.

This dossier includes articles by both Portuguese and non-Portuguese authors. All have done ethnographic fieldwork in post-colonial settings such as Goa, Diu, Lisbon – areas within countries inhabited by thousands of families with origins in former Portuguese colonies in India. The ethnographic descriptions and contexts presented by the authors contribute to widen the knowledge of the international academic production, and to highlight the Portuguese research on South Asian studies.

In this dossier, Rita Cachado examines South Asians in Portugal from the perspective of entrepreneurship in Lisbon. Hindu-Gujaratis came to Portugal in the early 1980s and are therefore deeply embedded in Portuguese society. Well-established shops owned by Hindus illustrate an important branch of the Gujarati diaspora. The author therefore analyses representations in relation to the Indian migrants' embeddedness through economic processes.

The representations about India by the lifestyle migrants in India and the Portuguese consumers of Indian popular culture is another strand of the research. Two papers challenge these hegemonic representations by deepening images of India through their role in daily life. Mari Korpela studies lifestyle immigrants in India and compares what it means to them to adopt Indian social habits in their everyday life, in Varanasi (north) and in Goa (south). Moreover, she explores the heterogeneity among them. Inês Lourenço provides insights into the importance of India as a reference when filling leisure time in Portugal. Furthermore, she contrasts the meanings attributed to India by the Portuguese who are practitioners of Bollywood dance with those of regular spectators of Bollywood movies.

A third less known perspective concerns the contemporary changes in representations about Goa and the former Portuguese administration through tourism and religion. Two papers discuss both producers and consumers of tourism, articulating it with religion. Pamila Gupta focuses on the religious exposition of the corpse of the catholic Saint Francis Xavier, a Jesuit missionary in Goa in the 16th century, when the territory first came under Portuguese administration. In this public display, the huge number of tourists and pilgrims consume "religion" and "history", but strikingly they also take part in producing a new image of Goa's colonial past and disseminating it for future generations. Cláudia Pereira examines the reshaping of the perception of a "tribe"

that is currently promoted to tourists as representative of the Goan identity; it represents “traditional Goa” through religious dances that have been socially constructed as vernaculars of the state, for dating back to prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century.

The papers in this dossier strive to contribute to scientific knowledge about Indians from former Portuguese colonies in India, at home and abroad; to provide new data about Indian migrant populations; and to explore emerging realities such as the immigrants in India, thus giving rise to the social construction of “other” Indias. Considering cultural representations and migration subjects, at first glance South Asian studies already seem well established in anthropological literature. However, we note that while the usual ethnographic contexts in this area are improving theoretical debates, they neglect the heterogeneity of the populations, and this ultimately impairs the debate. Simultaneously, we find a great variety of research from different scientific domains around the world, concerning South Asian studies produced by Portuguese researchers or on former Indian territories under Portuguese administration or on representations about India (e.g. Newman 2001; Bastos and Bastos 2001; Fruzzetti and Perez 2002; Roy 2002; Ashutosh 2008; Safran, Kumar and Lal 2008; Cardoso 2010; Chaturvedula 2010; Knott and McLoughlin 2010; Mapril 2010; Marques 2010; Mehta and Pandharipand 2011; Kumar 2011; Lourenço and Cachado 2012; Rosales 2012; Vicente 2012; Bauman and Young 2014; Frenz 2014; Oliveira, Dias and Padmadas 2014). We believe that the research of these authors, among others, should be developed to encompass less known cultural representations of Indian migrants and settlers.

Indians and their descendants, both within and outside of India, shape their lives and places in a distinct fashion and they negotiate representations that are, firstly, modelled by different historical and colonial pathways. As described in this dossier, the use of history must be seen in relation to the individual memory and daily life in terms of religion, symbols and localities, through social, cultural and historical approaches that transform imagination. Multiple processes of localisation, driven by migration dynamics, reflect ambivalent emotions of belonging vis-à-vis different national sites. Diverse life experiences, itineraries and memories contribute to the construction of real and imaginary spaces that act as strong features of identity in the present. The everyday pathways of South Asians show that India and Asian societies act as a permanent inspiration, nourished by the media and the contemporary consumption society.

REPRESENTATIONS OF INDIA AND THEIR ROLE IN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Cultural representations associated with India are explored through different analytic and ethnographic perspectives: they have a central role not only in South Asians' lives but also in the identity construction processes of lifestyle immigrants. Representation is a central feature of the process of meaning production. It is through representation that the members of a culture use language to produce meaning (see Hall 2003 [1997]). In this context, language should be interpreted broadly to include different kinds of visual images, performances and other kinds of language such as gestures, fashion or clothes; or even the human body, central in the process of representation and also easily representable (see Featherstone and Wernick 1995: 3). Moreover, meanings change over time and from one culture to another. In this sense, the meaning of things is never fixed, final or true (Hall 2003 [1997]: 61).

On the other hand, as the representation of "others" always implies interpretation, representations are never completely realistic (see Spivak and Harasym 1990). As can be seen in the papers that discuss the western relationship with Indian cultural representations, orientalist interpretations (cf. Saïd 2003 [1978]; Inden 1986) coexist with cosmopolitan perspectives (cf. Clifford 1992; Novak 2010) about cultural Indian references. In these processes, individuals articulate orientalist elements in accordance with their own perspectives on India and the way they fit into their lifestyles. Representations thus pervade the various topics of this dossier, described below.

OUTLINE OF THE DOSSIER

All the papers in this dossier are grounded in ethnography. The scientific core lies in anthropology, but history, cultural studies and sociology also support the theoretical backgrounds from an interdisciplinary perspective advocated by the editors. The papers, written by authors from Portugal, Finland, and South Africa, combine ethnographic methods, historical discourse analysis, and the examination of testimonials.

The dossier opens with two articles that address transformations in the contemporary representations of Goa, bridging past and present. Pamila Gupta illustrates the widespread representation in the decennial Exposition of Saint Francis Xavier among both Goan Catholic visitors and tourists: the cultural difference of Goa in India, which promotes the state as a tourist destination. The paper follows her ethnography on the social, religious, and touristic event. Readers can understand what it means to be in Goa during the Exposition of Saint Francis Xavier's corpse and how participants represent their singular experiences in heterogeneous modes. Gupta argues that, by disseminating a

hegemonic value to the fragile corpse through their visual consumption, the pilgrims and tourists are making history by being part of a postcolonial identity of the state under construction. This identity is based on a selected colonial representation.

Cláudia Pereira explores a less known aspect stimulated by tourism: the image of Goans who were previously thought of as “tribal” but are currently valued as Goa’s repository of the traditional. This state follows international tourism trends. Tourists look for specific Goan populations that live in an idealised past, and search for the experience of knowing the “tribal populations”. Therefore, identity construction and identity policies are part of what is shown to and told to tourists. Pereira concludes that the change in the “tribal” image, acknowledged by tourists, further modified the group’s representation of itself by giving it an awareness of its own identitary value.

The next two papers connect India and the “West” through cultural representations of India made by two kinds of consumers. Mari Korpela compares the notions of lifestyle held by immigrants in India from diverse areas of the world, such as Israel, North America, Australia and a number of European countries. They spend long periods in Varanasi and in Goa. In Varanasi, the search is for an “authentic” India. In Goa, they seem to look for a particular type of freedom, so they can develop a social construction of “other” Indias. In this paper, the reader will learn about the lifestyles of these immigrants in India, their activities and their Indian representations in light of what they have left in their home countries and what they find in two distinct emblematic settings within India. Korpela shows that they construct their own representations of “Incredible India”, in the search for a more meaningful lifestyle in the country, although the images attributed to it are themselves heterogeneous.

Inês Lourenço analyses the consumption of Bollywood in Portugal and its implications in the creation of new cosmopolitan identities through cultural alternatives originating from India. Her analysis of audiences of popular Indian cinema as well as those who practice Bollywood dance in Portugal examines how references to Indian popular culture are selected and how they contribute to the construction of these two different groups as alternative and creative cultural identities. The empirical data presented provide a reflection on the commodification processes of India to which old orientalist ideas still make a vigorous contribution. Critically rethinking the concept of cosmopolitanism, the author intends to show that the representation processes largely ignore the real life of individuals and societies upon which those representations are constructed, but continuously please the exotic Asian cool imagination.

The last paper portrays South Asians in Portugal. Rita Cachado studies South Asian merchants in Lisbon and their professional trajectories, following old Hindu shops and their owners’ narratives on the Portuguese economic

crisis. Though the majority prefer to remain where they settled over 30 years ago, some consider remigration. What was unexpected in her ethnography was that even though other countries, such as India and Mozambique, were experiencing economic growth during the Portuguese financial crisis, her interlocutors were very cautious in their discourses and in their choices for the near future. Ethnography also provided data that implies an analysis of the ethnic cluster concept. This article tends to agree with the mix-embeddedness approach more than that of the ethnic cluster, and the author explains this through an original overview of the urban areas where Hindu-Gujarati shopkeepers work and live.

As a whole, this dossier makes a critical analysis of the formation and recontextualisation of contemporary identities through the cultural representations of not only Indian migrants and settlers, but also lifestyle immigrants in India. It also addresses the role of colonial history and imagination and of the Indian migration and diaspora in less known contexts. All the contributions provide new arenas where cultural identity practices can be reconceptualised by incorporating cultural features and places that hitherto have scarcely been acknowledged.

REFERENCES

- APPADURAI, Arjun, 1996, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- ASHUTOSH, Ishan, 2008, "(Re-)creating the community: South Asian transnationalism on Chicago's Devon Avenue", *Urban Geography*, 29 (3): 224-245.
- BASTOS, Susana Trovão, and José Gabriel Pereira BASTOS, 2001, *De Moçambique a Portugal: Reinterpretações Identitárias do Hinduísmo em Viagem*. Lisbon, Fundação Oriente.
- BAUMAN, Chad M., and Richard Fox YOUNG, 2014, *Constructing Indian Christianities: Culture, Conversion and Caste*. Delhi, Routledge India.
- CARDOSO, Hugo, 2010, "The African slave population of Portuguese India: demographics and impact on Indo-Portuguese", *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, 25 (1): 95-119.
- CHATURVEDULA, Nandini, 2010, "Preserving purity: cultural exchange and contamination in late seventeenth century Portuguese India", *Ler História*, 58: 99-112.
- CLIFFORD, James, 1992, "Travelling cultures", in L. Grossler, C. Nelson and P. Trichler (eds.), *Cultural Studies*. New York, Routledge, 96-116.
- FEATHERSTONE, Mike, and Andrew WERNICK (eds.), 1995, *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*. London, Routledge.
- FRENZ, Margret Frenz, 2014, "Transimperial connections: East African Goan perspectives on 'Goa 1961'", *Contemporary South Asia*, 22 (3): 240-254.

- FRUZZETTI, Lina, and Rosa PEREZ, 2002, "The gender of the nation: allegoric femininity and women's statues in Bengal and Goa", *Etnográfica*, VI (1): 41-58.
- HALL, Stuart, 2003 [1997], *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London, Sage.
- INDEN, Ronald, 1986, "Orientalist constructions of India", *Modern Asian Studies*, 20 (3): 401-446.
- KNOTT, Kim, and Seán McLOUGHLIN (eds.), 2010, *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities*. London and New York, Zed Books.
- KUMAR, P. Pratap (ed.), 2011, special issue "Religion and the South Asian diaspora", *South Asian Diaspora*, 3 (1).
- LOURENÇO, Inês, and Rita CACHADO, 2012, "Hindu transnational families: transformation and continuity in diaspora families", *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 43 (1): 53-70.
- MAPRIL, José, 2010, "Banglapara: imigração, negócios e (in)formalidades em Lisboa", *Etnográfica*, 14 (2): 243-263, available at <<http://etnografica.revues.org/284>> (last access January 2017).
- MARQUES, Sandra C. S., 2010, "Réplicas topográficas nas narrativas de viagem sobre a Índia", *Etnográfica*, 14 (3): 419-442, available at <<http://etnografica.revues.org/241>> (last access January 2017).
- MEHTA, Bhattacharya, and Rajeshwari PANDHARIPAND (eds.), 2011, *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Cinema, Nation and Diaspora*. London and New York, Anthem Press.
- NEWMAN, Robert, 2001, *Of Umbrellas, Goddesses and Dreams: Essays on Goan Culture and Society*. Mapusa, Other India Book Press.
- NOVAK, David, 2010, "Cosmopolitanism, remediation and the ghost world of Bollywood", *Cultural Anthropology*, 25 (1): 40-72.
- OLIVEIRA, Isabel Tiago de, José G. DIAS, and Sabu S. PADMADAS, 2014, "Dominance of sterilization and alternative choices of contraception in India: an appraisal of the socioeconomic impact", *PLoS ONE*, 9 (1): e86654, available at <<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0086654>> (last access January 2017).
- ROSALES, Marta Vilar, 2012, "My umbilical cord to Goa: food, colonialism and transnational Goan life experiences", *Food and Foodways: Explorations in the History and Culture of Human Nourishment*, 20 (3-4): 233-256, available at <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07409710.2012.715966>> (last access January 2017).
- ROY, Srirupa, 2002, "Moving pictures: the postcolonial state and visual representations of India", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 36: 233-263, available at <<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/006996670203600108>> (last access January 2017).
- SAFRAN, William, Ajay KUMAR, and Brij V. LAL, 2008, special issue "Indian diaspora in transnational contexts", *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 29 (1), available at <<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjis20/29/1>> (last access January 2017).
- SAÏD, Edward, 2003 [1978], *Orientalism*. London, Penguin Books.
- SPIVAK, Gayatri, and Sarah HARASYM (eds.), 1990, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. London, Routledge.
- VICENTE, Filipa Lowndes, 2012, "A photograph of four orientalist (Bombay, 1885): knowledge production, religious identities, and the negotiation of invisible conflicts", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 55: 603-636.